

Alabama Department of Senior Services

Statewide Needs Assessment

Assessing the Prospective Needs of Alabama Seniors, Caregivers, and
Professionals in the Field of Aging and Disability
August 2009 – February 2010

Executive Summary

The Alabama Department of Senior Services (ADSS) 2009 statewide, comprehensive needs assessment was comprised of one needs assessment by the general public and a second needs assessment designed for professionals in the fields of aging and disability. These components supported the U.S. Administration on Aging's strategic goals and objectives. To minimize project costs, ADSS and Area Agency on Aging (AAA) staff designed and field-tested the two needs assessments. ADSS staff developed supporting software, posted the needs assessments to ADSS' website, and compiled statewide and region-specific reports.

The intent of the first needs assessment – for the general public – was to identify services that respondents believe to be important at this time and during the next five years. The second needs assessment gave professionals in the fields of aging and disability an opportunity to identify the highest priority needs in their communities, to describe their organizations' greatest challenges or barriers in serving older adults in Alabama, and to identify personal and service-related barriers in providing and accessing services. Each needs assessment included a variety of questions addressing many of the significant issues and trends as well as items of concern suggested by the Survey Development Committee. The Committee consisted of ADSS staff and three AAA Directors. The statewide report describes the methodologies utilized; the target populations and resulting samples, data collection and analyses conducted; and key findings. The full assessment report is located on the ADSS website, www.alabamaageline.gov

This descriptive, cross-sectional study included input from existing clients, the general public, and professionals in the fields of aging and disability across the state of Alabama. For the most part, the respondents answered most of the survey questions. Their replies gave us a better understanding of the social and health needs of Alabamians, particularly of the senior population, and identified many issues for consideration in the development of the new state plan on aging.

The 1,831 Survey #1 respondents and the 303 Survey #2 respondents noted the top services as:

Top Three Services (from Existing Clients and General Public)

1. Nursing care or physical therapy at home
2. Information on diseases and health problems
3. Information on keeping a healthy mind

Top Three Unmet Needs (from Professionals in Aging and Disability)

1. Transportation for people who no longer drive or are unable to use public transportation
2. Personal care for those with limitations in their activities of daily living
3. Quality, affordable health care.

Based on their organizations' experiences in serving older Alabamians, Survey #2 respondents identified the top two challenges or barriers as: (1) Insufficient funding for programs and services, and (2) regulatory or bureaucratic barriers that inhibit the organizations' ability to provide services. Given an opportunity to identify significant, recurring personal and service-related barriers that prevent people from accessing their organizations' services, Survey #2 respondents ranked the following barriers:

Top Three Personal Barriers

1. Poor health or mobility
2. Lack of transportation
3. Loss of financial security

Top Three Service-related Barriers

1. Long waiting lists
2. Cumbersome/lengthy eligibility determination process
3. Lack of volunteers

Increasing availability of up-to-date, quality information on available resources would assist older adults, individuals with disabilities, and their family members as well as members of Alabama's Aging Network. Providing consumer-directed single points of entry into the continuum of care and social services system, Alabama continues to establish Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC), which empower individuals to make informed choices and to streamline access for long-term care support and services. Alabama's goal is to have Resource Centers in every Area Agency on Aging region by the year 2014 serving as highly visible and trusted places where people can turn for information on the full range of long-term support options. Accessed via the worldwide web, ADSS implemented a virtual ADRC, Alabama Connect, to supplement the physical Resource Centers. The website, www.alabamaconnect.gov consists of a statewide database of organizations providing services to older adults, individuals with disabilities, and their family members. Family members residing away from their loved ones may search local resources that may be of assistance.

The Alabama Wellness Program is designed to help reduce the risk factors for chronic illnesses and disabilities among Alabama's senior population. Proving to be an effective way to promote successful aging, whole-person wellness programs are founded around the six dimensions of wellness – Emotional, Intellectual, Physical, Social, Spiritual, and Vocational Health – and personal wellness concepts such as self-responsibility, optimism, a self-directed approach, self-efficacy, and personal choice. As an extension of the whole person wellness trend, prevention efforts are in high demand. People of any age tend to be healthier, feel better, and maintain their mobility and independence longer when they exercise regularly and eat properly. This is especially true if one wants to prevent, delay, or manage heart disease, certain types of cancer, diabetes, obesity, anxiety, depression, arthritis, or osteoporosis. Poor health does not have to be an inevitable part of aging; small changes in one's life can make a difference.

Lack of safe, accessible, and affordable transportation, particularly in rural areas, greatly impacts the lives of senior citizens and individuals with disabilities, prohibiting access to needed services. United We Ride is an initiative that strives for coordinated human service transportation that calls for the development and implementation of a framework for action reducing and eliminating restrictive and duplicate laws, regulations, and programs related to

human service transportation. With the approval of the Federal Transit Administration, ADSS is administering Section 5316 Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program and Section 5317 New Freedom Program. The JARC program is designed to improve access to transportation services to employment and employment-related activities for welfare recipients and eligible low-income individuals and to transport residents of urbanized areas and nonurbanized areas to suburban employment opportunities. The New Freedom Program is intended to provide new public transportation services and alternatives that address the transportation needs of persons with disabilities that are beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

While they provided very useful information and insights, results of the 2009 statewide needs assessments cannot be examined in a vacuum. Other factors must be considered, such as recent economic conditions and the changing political climate. The demand for funding by ADSS, the AAAs, and local service providers continues to be greater than available federal, state, and local funds. While some programs are unfunded, other programs and services may not receive all of their requested funding. To provide as many services as possible to older persons and individuals with disabilities in the state, ADSS will continue to collaborate with other service providers, to coordinate the provision of services, and to maximize available resources.

While developing the new state plan on aging, ADSS will review the results of this study as it identifies goals, objectives, and strategies for the next four years. We will conduct more frequent needs assessments in the future and will focus each survey on a specific topic. By conducting more focused research, ADSS will continue to better understand the needs of older Alabamians and, consequently, more effectively develop programs and services to meet those needs.